

North Atlantic Right Whale Sighting Survey (NARWSS)  
and  
Sighting Advisory System (SAS)

2003 Results Summary

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OVERVIEW: The North Atlantic Right Whale Sighting Survey (NARWSS) is a NOAA Fisheries program dedicated to locating and recording the seasonal distribution of right whales off the northeastern United States. The Sighting Advisory System (SAS) is designed to reduce collisions between ships and right whales by alerting mariners to the presence of these whales via fax, email, the internet, Broadcast Notice to Mariners (BNM), NOAA Weather Radio, and the Mandatory Ship Reporting system (MSR). These reports are obtained from a variety of sources including the NARWSS, whale watches, Coast Guard, fishing vessels, commercial ships, and the general public. The results of both programs' efforts in 2003 are summarized in the following tables and figures.

NARWSS TABLE 1: Summarizes the number of flights and flight hours completed in each month the surveys were conducted by NARWSS during 2003. There were three primary types of surveys flown: broadscale, focused surveys in the Great South Channel (GSC) region and focused surveys over potential and realized Dynamic Area Management (DAM) closure zones. Broadscale surveys were flown along systematic east-west tracklines that covered all Federal waters west of the Hague Line from south of Long Island, New York, to Eastport, Maine. These surveys were flown to provide a synoptic view of right whale distribution; a completed series indicates coverage of the entire area. Surveys focused on the GSC served the dual purpose of providing relatively current locations of right whale aggregations to commercial shipping traffic and high photographic recapture rates of individuals for vital rate models of the population. DAM confirmation flights included flights made to investigate reported sightings of right whale aggregations outside existing closures, as well as monitoring aggregations' duration of residence within established DAM zones.

NARWSS FIGURE 1: Summarizes all NARWSS survey tracklines (thin lines) and right whale sighting locations (bullseyes) for 2003. Seasonal right whale closure areas in effect during each period are shown as bold lines. The duration for each closure area is as follows: Cape Cod Bay: Jan 1<sup>st</sup> - May 15<sup>th</sup>, Great South Channel: April 1<sup>st</sup> - June 30<sup>th</sup>, Seasonal Area Management (SAM) West: March 1<sup>st</sup> - April 30<sup>th</sup>, Seasonal Area Management (SAM) East: May 1<sup>st</sup> - July 31<sup>st</sup>.

SAS TABLE 1: Summarizes the number of reports broken down by reporting source and noting all late and unconfirmed reports. Unconfirmed reports did not produce an alert. Late reports generated an alert if it was likely the location would continue to be occupied by whales. Often sightings were combined into a single alert. A total of 134 alerts were broadcasted in 2003.

SAS FIGURE 1a: Illustrates the total number of reports received by source for each month of 2003 covering all sightings from Maine through New York SAS FIGURE 1b shows the same covering all sightings from New Jersey through North Carolina.

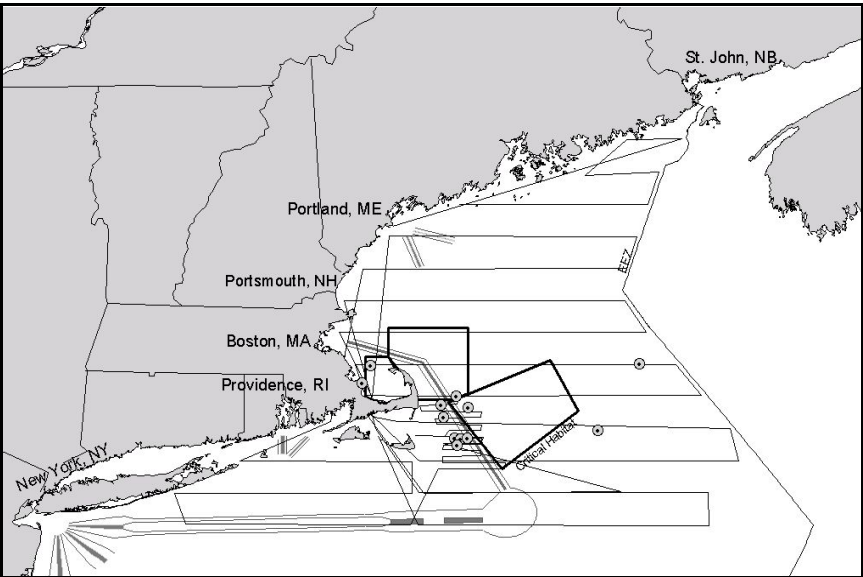
SAS FIGURE 2: Plots all sightings received by the SAS in 2003 in the northeast region, excluding unconfirmed reports. The number of whales reported in each sighting is depicted by graduated symbols and reporting source. The 50-fathom contour, 100-fathom contour, shipping lanes, Cape Cod Bay and Great South Channel Critical Habitat areas are included for reference.

NARWSS TABLE 1

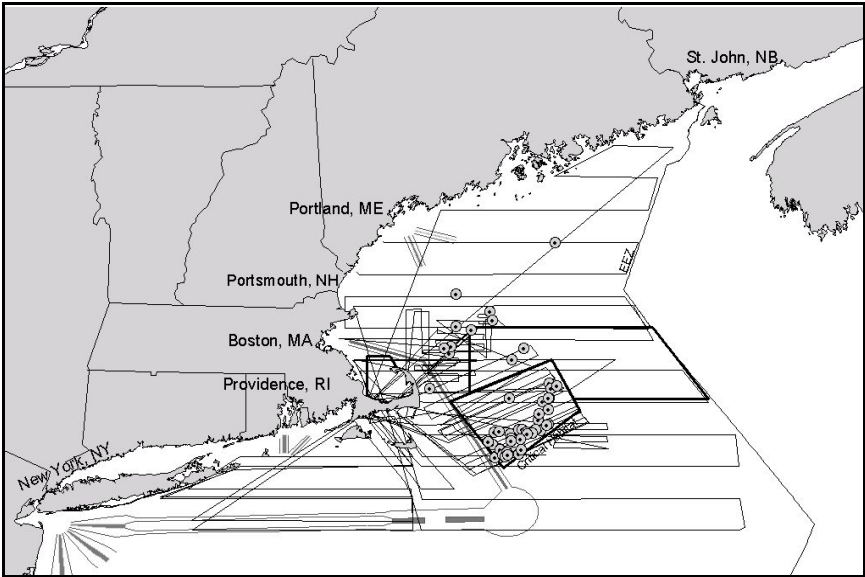
Month in 2003	Flight hours	# Flights*			Broadscale series completed	GSC surveys completed	DAM confirmation flights
		<i>broadscale</i>	<i>focused</i>	<i>other</i>			
April	43	7	2	1	1	1	0
May	111	15	6	1	1	4	1
June	118	17	6	0	1	4	2
July	59	7	5	0	1	0	3
August	42	0	10	0	0	0	0
September	26	5	1	0	0	0	0
October	59	11	0	1	1	0	0
November	24	2	3	0	1	0	0
December	3	0	1	0	0	0	1
<b>totals</b>	<b>485</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>

\*Flights that had both broadscale and focused survey time were counted as broadscale flights. Of the focused flights, 13 were strictly ‘management’ flights totaling 45 hours; these included DAM confirmations, disentanglement support, and carcass checks. Other flights included salmon pen photography, an oil spill flight, and a seal survey. The month of August was a dedicated photogrammetry project in the Bay of Fundy.

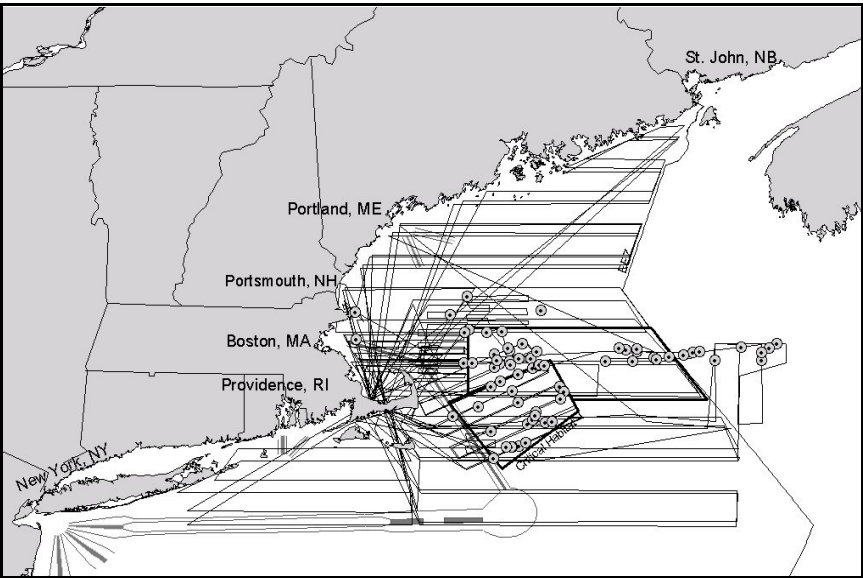
NARWSS FIGURE 1



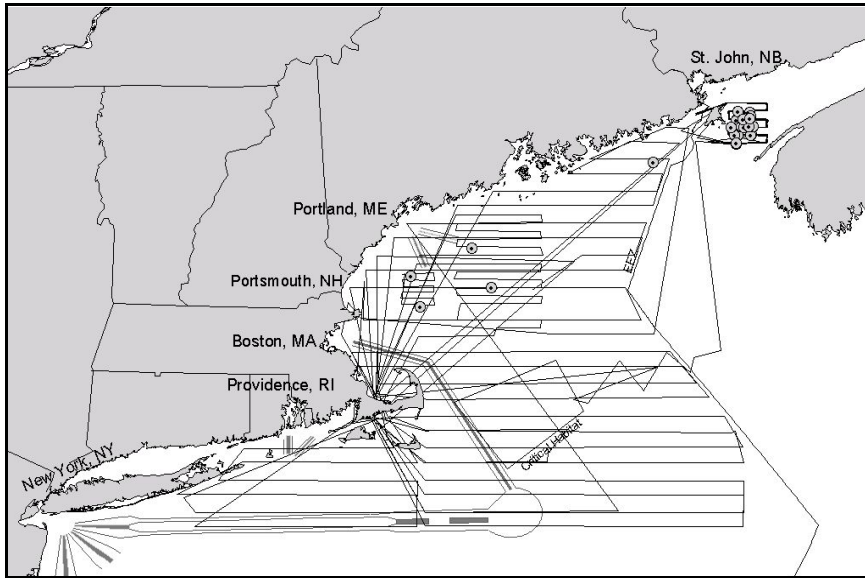
April 2003



May 2003



June - July 2003

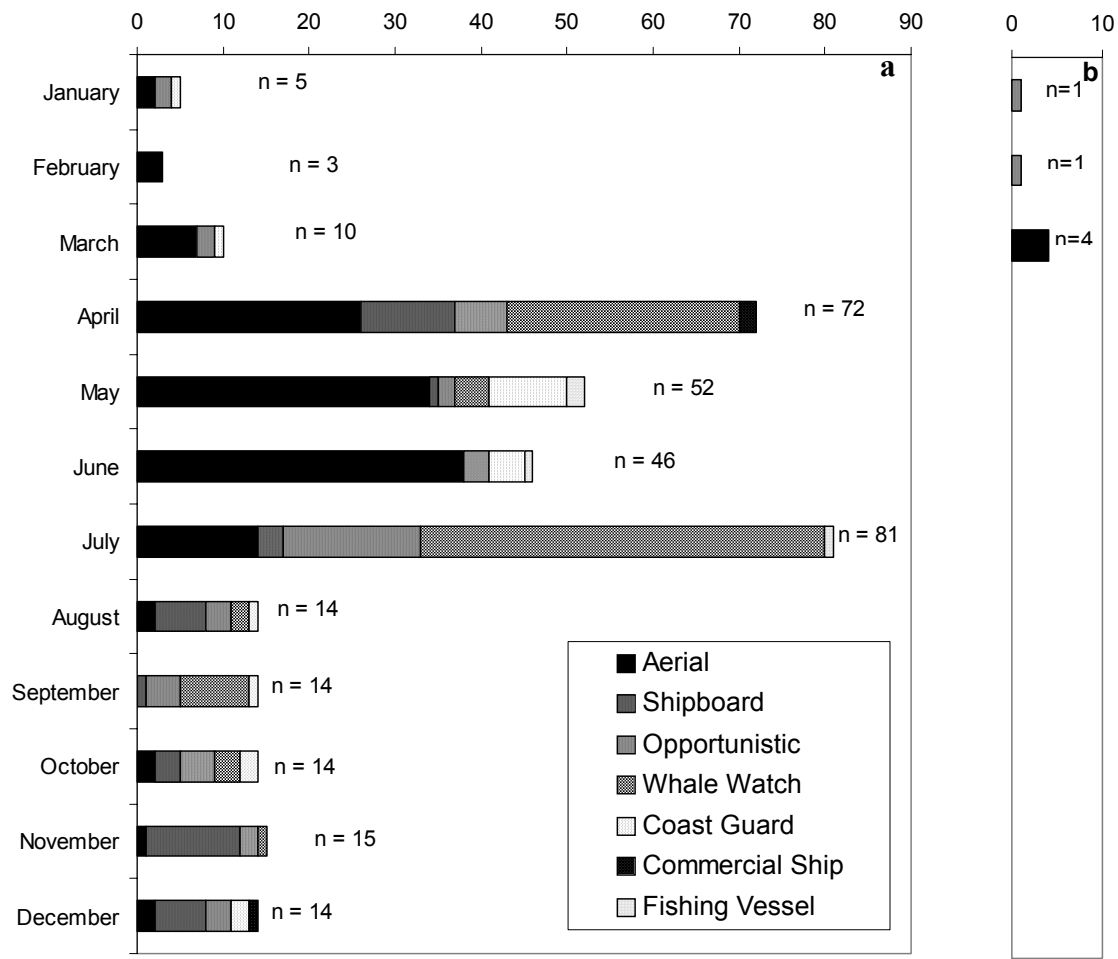


August - December 2003

SAS TABLE 1

Platform	# Reports	Unconfirmed	Late
Aerial survey	131		1
Shipboard survey	42		6
Whale Watch	91		4
Opportunistic	52	7	7
Coast Guard	22	2	3
Commercial Ship	3		
Fishing Vessel	4	1	3
<b>totals</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>24</b>

SAS FIGURE 1



SAS FIGURE 2

